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SITUATION ROOM

TOP SECRET 100326Z MAR 71 SENSITIVE EYES ONLY VIA CAS CHLS
FROM: DR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
TO : AMBASSADOR BUNKER
CITE: WHS1013

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

MARCH 9, 1971

WE UNDERSTAND FROM GENERAL ABRAMS THAT GVN IS NOW THINKING OF WITHDRAWING FROM LAOS DURING THE MONTH OF MARCH AND RESTING ON THEIR LAURELS FOLLOWING PUBLICIZED SEIZURE OF TCHEPONE. FOR THIS REASON, I WANTED YOU TO KNOW THE PRESIDENT'S VIEWS CONCERNING THE DURATION OF LAMSON 719:

1. WE ARE, OF COURSE, PREPARED TO ACCEPT GENERAL ABRAMS JUDGMENT ON THE DURATION OF THE OPERATION AS THE ABSOLUTELY DECISIVE FACTOR, BASED ON HIS OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE MILITARY SITUATION.

2. HOWEVER, SHOULD THERE BE ANY OTHER CONSIDERATIONS INFLUENCING A DECISION FOR THE EARLY WITHDRAWAL OF ARVN FORCES, WE WANT IT CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD THAT IN OUR VIEW THIS IS THE LAST CHANCE THAT ARVN WILL HAVE TO RECEIVE ANY SUBSTANTIAL U.S. SUPPORT ON THE SCALE NOW PROVIDED. THUS, THIS MAY BE OUR LAST OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE A SIGNIFICANT LONG-RANGE BENEFIT FROM LARGE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE ENEMY. YOU MAY BE SURE THAT NO ARTIFICIAL DEADLINES WITH RESPECT TO THE PROVISION OF U.S. SUPPORT WILL GOVERN THE DURATION OF THE CURRENT OPERATION. THE EARLIER ADMINISTRATIVE DEADLINE OF APRIL 5 FOR THE DURATION OF U.S. AIR SUPPORT WAS PURELY BUREAUCRATIC AND WILL BE LIFTED ANY TIME YOU AND GENERAL ABRAMS REQUEST ITS EXTENSION.

I WOULD URGE YOU TO SEE THIEU AND IMPRESS UPON HIM THE NEED NOT TO ALLOW THE POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS OF THIS OPERATION TO BE SACRIFICED FOR SHORT LIVED PUBLICITY BASED ON MORE LIMITED GAINS ACHIEVED THUS FAR. IF MILITARY CONDITIONS PERMIT, WE ANTICIPATE THAT LAMSON 719 SHOULD RUN WELL INTO THE MONTH OF APRIL, WITH THE WITHDRAWAL SCHEDULED FOR THE PERIOD JUST PRIOR TO THE END OF THIS DRY SEASON.

THIEU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT HE WILL HAVE EVERY SUPPORT FROM HERE FOR THE PROVISION OF NECESSARY U.S. AIR ASSETS IN LAOS AND WHATEVER IN-COUNTRY SECURITY ASSISTS GENERAL ABRAMS CONSIDERS FEASIBLE. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, EVERY WEEK ARVN STAYS IN LAOS REPRESENTS A SERIOUS BLOW TO THE ENEMY'S OFFENSIVE CAPABILITY, NOT ONLY FOR THIS DRY SEASON BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, FOR THE NEXT.

WE HAVE NOT GONE THROUGH ALL OF THIS AGONY JUST FOR THE FAVORABLE HEADLINES ACHIEVED AS A RESULT OF RECENT SUCCESSES AND WOULD HOPE THAT PRESIDENT THIEU WOULD VIEW THE SITUATION FROM THE SAME PERSPECTIVE.

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VIA CAS BACK CHANNEL

WHS 1013

March 9, 1971

FOR: AMBASSADOR BUNKER

FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER

Aug 71

We understand from General Abrams that GVN is now thinking of withdrawing from Laos during the month of March and resting on their laurels following publicized seizure of Tchepone. For this reason, I wanted you to know the President's views concerning the duration of Lamson 719:

1. We are, of course, prepared to accept General Abrams judgment on the duration of the operation as the absolutely decisive factor, based on his overall assessment of the military situation.

2. However, should there be any other considerations influencing a decision for the early withdrawal of ARVN forces, we want it clearly understood that in our view this is the last chance that ARVN will have to receive any substantial U.S. support on the scale now provided. Thus, this may be our last opportunity to achieve a significant long-range benefit from large offensive operations against the enemy. You may be sure that no artificial deadlines with respect to the provision of U.S. support will govern the duration of the current operation. The

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earlier administrative deadline of April 5 for the duration of U.S. air support was purely bureaucratic and will be lifted any time you and General Abrams request its extension.

I would urge you to see Thieu and impress upon him the need not to allow the potentially significant benefits of this operation to be sacrificed for short lived publicity based on more limited gains achieved thus far. If military conditions permit, we anticipate that Lamson 719 should run well into the month of April, with the withdrawal scheduled for the period just prior to the end of this dry season.

Thieu should understand that he will have every support from here for the provision of necessary U.S. air assets in Laos and whatever in-country security assists General Abrams considers feasible. From our perspective, every week ARVN stays in Laos represents a serious blow to the enemy's offensive capability, not only for this dry season but, more importantly, for the next.

We have not gone through all of this agony just for the favorable headlines achieved as a result of recent successes and would hope that President Thieu would view the situation from the same perspective.

Warm regards.

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